



Characteristics of service learning at Jesuit colleges and universities

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Summary

Mission statements are a guide for goal-setting, decision-making, and priority-identification; the institutionalization of service learning has been dependent upon making strong linkages between university mission and service-learning practice. This research project critically examined whether certain key characteristics of Jesuit education are or are not infused in the practice of service learning at American Jesuit Colleges and Universities (AJCU) such that they impact student learning. The research model presented here could serve as a tool for institutions seeking to understand relationships between mission and practice.

The research identified the *intentions* of AJCU service learning programs (i.e., whether they were designed with characteristically Jesuit outcomes in mind). It also investigated the *operationalization* of those intentions. This research project identified and defined three student learning and development outcomes linked to Jesuit education: social justice, solidarity, and spirituality. It explored whether and how service learning program directors at AJCU schools intentionally design their practice to achieve these outcomes. Using a multi method approach, the authors administered a web based survey of the 28

directors of service-learning programs in the AJCU network and conducted document review of the web presence of each of these programs in the spring of 2012. The survey collected qualitative and quantitative data about the intentional incorporation of specific Jesuit values into the design and practice of service learning programs.

Student service learning outcomes are mostly in the hands of faculty members who teach service learning courses. However, accountability for achieving these outcomes often falls to service learning program directors. Many institutions may recognize this tension and learn from the approaches and varying degrees of success experienced by the research subjects as well as the conclusions and recommendations the authors provide.

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